

Sedalia Weekly Conservator.

VOL. 1.

SEDALIA, MISSOURI, SATURDAY, JULY 18, 1903.

NO. 11

The Negro Problem And The New Negro Crime.

[By the Editor of Harper's Weekly.]

A well-known and well-informed member of the Federal House of Representatives from Alabama, Mr. Bankhead, recently asserted that since the State Constitution by which Negroes are disfranchised became operative in Mississippi, there has not occurred in that State a single instance of the so-called "new" Negro crime, by which is meant the crime against white women. The Representative went on to say that, if this crime should become unknown in this section of the country, there would be no "Negro problem," so far as the South is concerned. The alleged fact in Mississippi was cited by way of proof that the crime to which we have referred should be attributed to the notions of political and social equality with which the generation of blacks then growing up became imbued during the reconstruction period. The inference drawn was that, with the practical collapse of the reconstruction legislation and the consequent vanishing of notions of political and social equality, the crime would become extinct. In further support of this theory of the origin of the crime, and of the remedy therefore, it is pointed out that this particular atrocity which is the curse of the South, and has compelled the families of white planters in the black belt to migrate from the rural districts into towns, was entirely unknown before the civil war, and remained unknown for some years thereafter, so long as the ideas and habits acquired under the slavery regime remained dominant in the Negro element of the Southern population.

Before accepting this theory, to which Mr. Bankhead is a convert, we should mention that an entirely different cause is assigned to the crime by other men, who also have made a careful study of the subject.

Keeping in view of the dates at and localities in which the outrages which have been perpetrated, and marking also the personal history of criminals, they have arrived at the conclusion that such outrages are sporadic indications of a lapse of the Southern Negro into a state of barbarism or savagery, in which the gratification of the brutish instincts is no longer subjected to the restraints of civilization. They point to the condition of things of things in Haiti as furnishing corroborative that a disregard for sexual restraints is characteristic of a community which has undergone social degeneration. This is a plausible hypothesis, and it has been accepted by many persons who have observed, or think they have observed, that the generation of the Southern Negroes which has grown up since the civil war is morally and intellectually inferior to the preceding generation which was the product of the slavery regime. It is generally acknowledged, we believe, that the new Negro at the South is less industrious, less thrifty, less trustworthy, and less self-controlled than was his father or grandfather. Nevertheless, the theory which imputes the emergence of a new crime to a tendency of the Southern blacks to relapse into savagery cannot be easily reconciled with another class of facts. We refer to the frequent

occurrence of the new crime in the Northern States, where the Negro cannot be supposed to be lapsing into barbarism, because he is surrounded by the civilizing influences of a white race vastly preponderant in numbers. Exact statistical data are not yet forth coming, but those who have investigated the matter express the opinion that the particular crime in question is committed even more frequently by Negroes at the North than at the South, if the small numerical proportion which they bear to the environing white population in the former section be kept in view. Moreover, at the North, as at the South, the phenomenon is a novel one, there was in the Northern States, we believe, no instance of the crime which we are now discussing before the civil war. It would be absurd to contend, however, that the Negroes in the Northern States are not at the present time as civilized as they were forty odd years ago. In their case, therefore, we must reject the explanation which ascribes the new Negro crime to a lapse into savagery.

On the whole, we are inclined to think that there is some basis for the hypothesis which makes the reconstruction legislation and the ideas generated by it responsible for the evolution of the new Negro crime.

This hypothesis fits all the facts, being as applicable to the phenomena reported in the Northern as to those observed in the Southern States. In the Northern States the Negro not only possesses the franchise, but is encouraged to exercise it. Neither is the encouragement confined to one of the great political parties, for it is well understood that in certain States of the East and central West the Negro vote may turn the scale at closely contested elections. Nor is there any doubt that the Negro enjoys more social equality at the North than at the South.

It is true that in our Northern cities black men are debarred by custom, though not by law, from many theatres, hotels, and restaurants; but they are not forced to occupy separate cars on railways and tramways. In Washington for many years Negro officials of the District of Columbia have been permitted to attend one of the Presidents' receptions, although Mr. Booker Washington is, so far as we can now recall, the only colored man that has been invited to dine at the White House. There is, in a word, no doubt that at the North the black man has attained not only complete political equality, but a closer approach to social equality, than he is ever likely to attain at the South. It would be difficult not to associate the phenomena as cause and effect, if, upon thorough investigation, it should prove true that the new Negro crime is actually more frequent, proportionally to numbers, at the North than it is at the South.

Will the experience of Mississippi, with regard to the extinction of the crime be repeated in the other Southern States, which have virtually set at naught the reconstruction legislation, by disfranchising the Negroes? It is too early to expect

an answer to this question, for their new State Constitutions have not been operative for a sufficiently long period. It is said, however, that already in Alabama the number of outrages has noticeably decreased. It would be superfluous to point out the tremendous importance of the matter, not only to the Southern whites, but to the Southern blacks themselves. If the new Negro crime became extinct in the Gulf States, the old plantation life might be resumed, and the black laborers would again be brought under civilizing influences, instead of being left to drift into isolated communities. The whole attitude of the Southern white toward his black neighbor would be revolutionized, and the two races would be brought into economic relations that would prove mutually beneficial. Should this prove to be the effect of the new State Constitutions, the American people may have cause to bless the refusal of the United States Supreme Court to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment.

In every Southern community where the new Negro crime has been prevalent, there has been engendered a tendency to race aloofness and hatred; nor can we doubt that the extinction of the crime is the indispensable condition of a revival of the old pacific, trustful, and friendly inter-lations. We sincerely hope that the facts with regard to Mississippi are correctly stated by Mr. Bankhead. If they are, we are inclined to adopt his interpretation of their significance.

Mob Spirit Growing.

The Afro American Council in session at Louisville, Ky., last week during its closing session adopted an address to the country at large on the race, in which it is declared that while the lynching of Negroes is decreasing the mob spirit is growing and mob law is extending. The address says in part:—Who can fail to see that the Negro is being held up to the public gaze as the most objectionable and undesirable citizen? The ignorant, vicious, criminal classes are pointed to as the types and products of the race, rather than those who are the output of the Negro's best endeavors for race development and uplift. We declare this standard of measurement to be unfair to any people.

As to mob violence, it is gratifying to note that for the last year or two the number of victims shows a decided decrease, and while all of these were not members of our race, the vast majority was. Notwithstanding this fact, we should not feel called upon to discuss the matter at this time were it not that, while the number of victims is decreasing, the variety of provocations which lead up to this act of violence is growing more and more insignificant and numerous. It is not an unusual thing to read of Negroes being lynched for impudence, refusing to obey, striking a white man, etc.

Now, we submit, that lynching for any cause is destructive of law, is demoralizing; but to subject persons accused of, even guilty of, such trivial offenses to unlawful punishment and death is to make the Negro the marked man of the nation; for him to suffer violence in such cause will eventually involve many of our best people. We ask in all sincerity, Is this right? Such conditions indicate clearly a tendency

to anarchy and anarchy for the Negro will terminate in anarchy for all men. We make no plea for any man who may be proved guilty; our plea is for law and for the protection of the innocent.

It is now clearly evident that the purpose of those who first started ostensibly to disfranchise the ignorant Negro has been broadened and strengthened. Their purpose now includes all the Negroes. In certain of the States this result has already been achieved, and thousands of qualified men are denied the right to vote. In such States taxation without representation prevails as truly as ever it did when England held control over the American colonies. We make no objection to the disfranchisement of the ignorant Negro, provided the same class of the other races is similarly dealt with. Our contention is not for special but for equal privileges.

As an example of the growth of the mob spirit the old and respectable city of Evansville, Ind., came under mob rule last Sunday. A policeman was shot and killed and, as the murderer was a Negro, evil disposed individuals set out to lynch him. Not being able to get the murderer, the mob began attacking all the Negroes it came across. Some of the black men tried to defend themselves. That infuriated the rioters, who do not concede to the Negro the right of self defense. Eventually nine people were killed, thirty five wounded and, altho martial law was not proclaimed, the town has since been under control of the Militia.

Probably if an Evansville policeman had been killed by a Negro a year ago there would have been no rioting, but today the mob spirit is rife in many northern cities. Lawlessness in one community inflames the lawless element in another community and it lays hold of the first opportunity to break the law. It is evident that the lynchings at Belleville and Wilmington, reported in these columns at the time, and attempted lynchings at other points were one great cause of the attempted lynching at Evansville and outrageous defiance of law in a notably large number of places in the past few weeks.

The Week's Current.

The Spur that Makes Men Struggle.

It is astonishing how much power there is in an intense longing or divine hunger to achieve the particular thing which lies nearest the heart.

Napoleon used to say that a firm resolution can make realities out of possibilities.

When I see a youth who has a purpose stamped upon his features; when I see him working for this pearl of great price, early and late, so that he cannot be turned from his course a hair's breath, no matter what tempts him, I feel sure that he will succeed. I never knew a person who struggled hard, persistently, and enthusiastically for years toward a certain object, who did not, at least approximately, attain his end.

On the other hand, when I see one shirking his duties, who is listless, shiftless, indolent, ambitionless, and shows no desire to get on, no ambition, or aspiration which leads him upward, I feel assured that this boy will not succeed.

It is this divine hunger for knowledge or skill which measures out

success power. No youth can accomplish much without a clean cut purpose, a lofty ambition, and a longing to accomplish the thing on which he has set his heart.

A worthy ambition is the spur that makes man struggle with his destiny. The surest sign of the genius that can accomplish things—that can bring things to pass, is a divine longing for accomplishment, or yearning to do something and be somebody in the world.

Lincoln had his divine hunger, which impelled him to tramp hundreds of miles in the forest, bare footed, to borrow books which he could not afford to buy.

This hunger for knowledge, this yearning aspiration, struggling for expansion and growth, this longing which ever looks upward and toward the light—this is the kind of genius which every youth should cultivate.

The boy Garfield showed this divine hunger when he applied for a chance to ring the academy bell and sweep the floors for his tuition, and when he cut wood for fifty consecutive days in order to earn a few dollars to make his way at school.

June Success.

Negro Bell Boy's Ambitions.

Expects Some Day to Found Great School for His Race.

The only Negro graduate in the class of 1902 at the Kansas State Normal college, at Emporia, is captain of the bell boys at the Midland hotel in this city. He is Alonzo J. Bowling, aged 24 years, and he expects to follow educational work for his life's vocation. He has a dream that he will some day become the head of a great school for the Negro children and youth of the United States, greater even than the Tuskegee Institute, of which Booker T. Washington is the head. And there is nothing visionary in the position of the young man who has worked his way thru the great Normal college of Kansas, and who will go this fall to Ann Harbor, Mich., there to continue his preparation for educating the negroes in a five years' course in Literature and fine Arts. For that is the plan, and it will be carried out to the letter. Bowling has done enough so far in his work to give assurance that he will go on.

This remarkable young negro is a native of Kentucky, where at the age of 16 years he began teaching public school. He returned to his native town last summer and there conducted the county teacher's institute at a salary of five dollars a day—and it was asserted that the old institute for negro teachers at Russellville had never before been so well conducted or the results so satisfactory. Bowling earned his own way thru the High School at Kansas City, Kas. and later in Topeka. He made every cent of the money it required to gain him his degrees and honors at Emporia. His vacation employment has been at the Midland Hotel for many years. During the term, he has worked as waiter, in boarding clubs at the college. This is the manner in which he expects to gain his way thru Ann Harbor college. While in the Kansas Normal, he devoted a great deal of attention to wood carving and iron grill work. He took first prize in the former, and that employment netted him a neat addition to his income as waiter.

Young Bowling is very black. He has the intelligent features and the well formed head of the deep thinker. In his color alone is he typically a negro. In his poise, demeanor, and habits of conversation he is characteristically a well bred man. He has ambition enough to win degrees from the greatest universities and presence enough to make people respect him. "I have only one desire," said he in talking of his intended career, "That is to become a great educator. There is a field for the effort, which I expect to make and I believe the field is ready. It will be an easy matter to establish a great college for the negro youth, and that is the ambition I hope to realize."

—Exchange.